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Identical letters dated 4 January 2006 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and to the President of the Security Council

I enclose herewith a letter from the Syrian Government concerning the Israeli plan to divide the Syrian occupied village of al-Ghajar (see annex), which constitutes a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Fayssal **Mekdad**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the identical letters dated 4 January 2006 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and to the President of the Security Council

[Original: Arabic]

Syrian Arab Republic
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

1. The Syrian Government has received various complaints from inhabitants of the occupied Syrian village of al-Ghajar stating that, for several weeks now, the Israeli occupation army has been engaged in intimidating and harassing the village population with the aim of dividing the village by erecting a boundary fence to bisect it in accordance with the United Nations Blue Line demarcated in 2000. Israel is to transfer all villagers living north of the Blue Line to the southern part of the village and then build a security wall on the Blue Line, ultimately separating the southern and northern parts of the village so that its northern part is with Lebanon and its southern part is under Israeli occupation.

2. Following the recent events which occurred in the village of al-Ghajar, the inhabitants of the village were informed last week by the occupation forces that they had to evacuate the northern part of the village by the end of March 2006, meaning the transfer of 90 per cent of the villagers to the southern part. If the villagers fail to evacuate, the village is to be sealed off by the occupation forces and the villagers forbidden to go beyond the wall surrounding the village.

3. Coinciding with these events and in furtherance of the plan to divide the village, a hearing took place in the Israeli High Court in Jerusalem in which the public prosecution requested the following:

(a) A ban on the entry of all vehicles to the village of al-Ghajar, including even those belonging to inhabitants, with permission for the latter to enter Lebanon only on foot;

(b) The issuance of an order for inhabitants to relocate to the southern part of the village, meaning that there is no other option before them. The Israeli prosecution holds that its soldiers shall not be exposed to risk for the sake of people residing in the northern part of the village.

4. Israel's division of the village and transfer of civilian population away from its land will lead to the confiscation of a 900-dunum area belonging to villagers and to the situation of that area outside the wall which Israel is intending to erect, consequently altering the demography of the village. Israel's operation to force civilians to relocate to the southern part of the village also constitutes a violation of international humanitarian law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the transfer of civilian population under occupation. Furthermore, this act constitutes a crime against humanity under the Statute of the International Criminal Court; article 7 provides that the act of "deportation or forcible transfer of population" constitutes a crime against humanity which is punishable by and within the jurisdiction of the Court.

5. The village of al-Ghajar is a Syrian village occupied in 1967 by Israel. The inhabitants of the village are Syrian Arab citizens, most of whom hold Syrian identity cards and were living there before 1967. Title deeds moreover specify that the village and its lands belong to the Syrian governorate of Quneitra. The operation to divide the village is therefore such as to alter its demography.

6. In compliance with international law and international humanitarian law, the Syrian Arab Republic calls on the international community to assume its responsibility in exerting pressure on Israel in order to compel it to stop this crime and to prevent the village of al-Ghajar from being unilaterally divided in a manner counter to international legitimacy, as well as to end the human, social and economic suffering of the inhabitants of the village, since it is depriving them of their homes, land and livelihoods, severing close ties and separating the village population and individual families.

7. The Syrian Arab Republic also reserves its right to call for the adoption of such measures as are necessary to prevent Israel from dividing the occupied Syrian village of al-Ghajar.